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Soviets accused of using slave labor on pipeline

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The State Department, backed by a CIA study, accuses the Soviet Union of having the world's largest number of forced laborers and says some of them probably are building the controversial Siberian pipeline.

"Decency compels us to express our distress at the Soviet Union's exploitation of forced labor," the State Department said in a letter to Sen. William Armstrong, R-Colo., who released a preliminary department report on the situation Friday.

"There is clear evidence that the Soviet Union is using forced labor on a massive scale. This includes the use of political prisoners," said the letter.

"We have information from a variety of sources which confirms that the Soviets routinely employ a portion of their four million forced laborers, the world's largest forced labor population, as unskilled workers on domestic pipeline projects."

The State Department said forced labor has been used by the Soviets on such large-scale developments as the Baikal-Amur railroad, the Bielomorsk and Volga-Don canals, the Moscow subway, and the Kama River truck plant.

The report was prepared in response to charges that slave labor is being used to build the Siberia-to-Europe natural gas pipeline. The administration has imposed pipeline-related sanctions strongly opposed by Western Europe.

Regarding the pipeline, the summary sent to Armstrong said "It cannot yet be conclusively established whether such labor is being used specifically on the export pipeline project."

But, it added, "a number of reports suggest that forced labor has been used in some of the site preparation clearing the forests, leveling the right-of-way, building roads, and constructing living quarters."

An unclassified CIA study attached to the report to Armstrong said "It seems that some forced labor would be used along the export route for compressor station and auxiliary construction unless the Soviets depart from their usual practice because of the exposure in the Western media."

The CIA study noted that "There are about 100 heavily secured forced labor camps close to the proposed route, all of which existed before the start of construction of the export pipeline."

The proposed 3,600-mile-long Siberian natural gas pipeline stretches from the Soviet Union's Urengov gas fields down into Western Europe. It is being built at a cost of \$10 billion, much of it in Western credits and technology.

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